



Father Brian Ching
Oral History Transcription
Saint Mary's College COVID-19 Oral History Project

Interviewed by:	Jamie Wagman and Julia Dauer
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Summary:	Father Brian Ching explained how being in a seminary on a college campus shaped his experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. Father Brian also discussed what changes he has witnessed in his students as a result of the pandemic. This interview was part of a collaboration between the CRHC and Saint Mary's College History Department to collect stories of those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 00:09 [Jamie Wagman] I am Jamie Wagman and I'm here with Julia Dauer, and it's May 4th at 9:00 AM, and we're interviewing Father Brian on Zoom. Good morning.
- 00:22 [Fr. Brian Ching] Good morning.
- 00:24 [JW] And Father Brian, where do you live?
- 00:26 [BC] So, I currently reside at Pangborn Hall, which is part of the broader community of priests and brothers of Holy Cross at Notre Dame.
- 00:35 [JW] OK great, and could you describe a little bit about your life before the pandemic?
- 00:43 [BC] Sure. Prior to the pandemic, I was the rector of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. I was actually living at Old College Undergraduate Seminary, which is a household formation for undergraduate men here on the Notre Dame's campus. So life was pretty normal, full college life, you know. We had ten guys in the house doing their things doing, you know, we had a full football season right before the pandemic, so navigating that. This is my first year as rector, so it's just sort of trying to come to understand the fullness of everything that goes on in the Basilica in the course of a normal year. And then of course, our men in formation were just trucking right along with their usual classes, and common prayer, or common table, all those sort of things.
- 01:33 [Julia Dauer] Can I ask you to say a little bit more about that role as rector? So does that mean you're— my understanding is that it means you're responsible for all the programming that happens? They're basically in charge of what happens at the basilica, is that accurate?
- 01:44 [BC] Yes. So as rector of the Basilica, you're responsible for the overall kind of vision, as well as providing schedule, and kind of feel — vibe might be good word of the liturgical experience of the Basilica, as well as maintenance requests and projects, like keeping the floors clean, making sure the windows stay in their places. A whole gambit of things. Obviously there's a great staff. But the rector exercises oversight over the Basilica in that matter.
- 02:18 [JD] Thank you.
- 02:20 [JW] And Father Brian, when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your initial thoughts and some early experiences?
- 02:28 [BC] Sure. I think we first learned about COVID in about January of 2020, and there was still kind of an over there sort of thing. And those realities had happened before. I mean, I at least have lived through each one— H1N1, and alien flu, and there have been Ebola Africa. So there's certainly been outbreaks of significant disease in other parts of the world

that have made news here in the United States, but never really impacted our lives in the same way. And I think that those very initial first weeks, we kinda assume that this would be just another one of those things. You know, a pandemic or an endemic that would hit a particular region and hit it hard. Certainly, a source of great concern and angst, but at the same time, something that is still a little bit foreign, or would've stayed little bit foreign to our experience. That being said, I was actually in London on a business trip when the whole world sort of came to grinding halt. So, I was a seminarian studying at the seminary in the archdiocese of Westminster, London, itself. It was the spring break here in at Notre Dame, so I went to visit him and literally I think two days into that trip, was when we got called up the universe was going to shut down, that all the study abroad students were being recalled. It was convenient in that I was able to take the seminarian back with me, so I wasn't traveling alone and a little bit of like frequent flyers helped make that trip home much easier. And that's I think the first moment where we really sort of realized this was gonna be a very significant, monumental occurrence kind of like fleeing the UK. The concern was you're gonna get stuck there and the orders gonna get shot and all those sorts of things. So, we're trying to, like, exit United Kingdom in 24 hours.

04:35 [JW] Wow. Well, and then how did your life change in the early pandemic with your various communities that you're part of? You know, spiritually?

04:47 [BC] Sure. We became a lot more like hermits, I certainly did. All of the seminarians went and stayed home, so they did not come back from spring break. But because I've been in Europe, I was in quarantine, like one of the first ones for 14 days right after coming back. And in an empty house, and it was, you know, people were kind enough to drop off food and things like that, so we became just a lot more individualized. You know, so much for us and our life at Holy Cross, so much of our life is communal. Going to prayer together, and eating together, and all of a sudden, we were doing all of those things alone. And especially for both those first few couple weeks you figured, sort of bread and bear it to get through it and at some point, it'll all come back to normal again. And I think that was like the attitude. I mean, phrases like "two weeks to stop the spread down, we'll get through it together", and at some point it became clear that was not to be the case. And that led to some longer term thinking about how we were going to live our religious life as best as we could, but in a manner that was safe and conscious of everyone's health and well-being.

06:07 [JW] And how did you make some of those early decisions?

06:11 [BC] So those were not entirely mine, those are part of our overall religious community. So obviously, with respect to the Basilica, but the

primary one was that we suspended all in-person masses. That was a significant shift, I mean, the outbreak of the pandemic was the second or third week of lent. So we were really gearing up for Easter, and so we suspended in-person mass. We kind of moved to having things live-streamed. Thanks be to God the mass of the Basilica on Sundays have been televised for like 15 years, so it was a convenient shift there, it's a relatively easy shift to live-stream our masses. And so all we have is an empty church with maybe 20-25 of the Holy Cross religious, who are here on campus. We can figure that we constituted a particular household. But, you know, we spread out six feet apart. Luckily the Basilica is a large space, and we were able to kind of spread everyone throughout the church. We did Easter that way, we did holy Thursday and Good Friday that way. I think we allowed a couple of folks from the campus ministry staff to come in, and do things like sing and the readings. So that was a market shift that our liturgical life, which is so much focused on kind of nursing others, to a really big move strictly to online format. And then our common life, we prayed together in common, again very, very spread out six feet apart. We did things like, you know, up until that point, we just have a stack of prayer books, and you would just pick one up and walk into the chapel and use it. And all of a sudden everyone got assigned their prayer work. Everyone got assigned to a hymnal. And now looking back on some of those things seemed a little bit ludicrous, now given what we knew, that's how the way we encountered those moments. So there's like just a very odd sort of trying to make this work, you know. Our common table went to a much larger space. I think we took over a common space here on campus, we sat 3 to a table. It's just, it's hard to have a conversation every day. But just like it makes choosing your seatmates very important. And you know, I think Notre Dame food services was great, but all the food came in kind of pre-packaged. The kitchen staff would kind of like set it out and leave, and we would come in and pick them up, and sort of eat out of these plastic containers. Famously, everyone was using plastic utensils for those first four or five months, which was entertaining and frustrating all at the same time. I think everyone went through 4-5 knives or forks for dinner just because, you know, that's what they had. The food was interesting, you know, it was clear that we were the only group of people eating on campus on a regular basis. So like whatever was in storage is what we got fed, so we had some pretty nice meals. Clearly there are some pretty nice events that on the books and being planned that they had ordered food for. But yeah, that was sort of an adjusted reality. We were used to sitting down and having a family style meal with 6-7-8 to a table, and now it's sort of three and pre-packaged, spread apart, and that was hard. It was especially hard for some of our older men, for whom this feels like massively traumatic stuff.

- 10:05 [JW] How did it feel for you?
- 10:10 [BC] You know, it was for what it was me. Not ideal, not great, but at the same time, just grateful to be able to have a supportive group of people around, you know. Any number of my friends who had graduated and were still sort of living in the professional world, and were kind of on their own and stuck in their own apartments, and kind of had to exist their entire lives through Zoom, and phone calls, and texts. So at least I was able to see other people each day, you know, that was really a great blessing. Go out for a walk, or go out for a walk with friends even. You know, so there was a glimmer of hope there, that even in the midst of a lot of different life, just immense gratitude that we still had those basic structures of common prayer and common table, and just communal life. Though different, we're at least existing, so there's a deep breath here for that.
- 11:21 [JW] And what was the biggest challenge for you in 2020?
- 11:27 [BC] Sure, I mean so there are a lot of practical, logistical challenges. I had, you know, eight kids worth of stuff in the house, and they were all home and, you know, they're trying to figure out how to get that back home to them. A significant challenge was tending to our students' needs, my students' needs. At the college seminary, their life was very, very different. They're used to living in very tight and cramped quarters, and that creates a sense of community and kind of stuck togetherness that they were just not experiencing. So they were, you know, we tried our best to sort of get together via Zoom once week, or something along those lines, but kind of helping them encounter the pandemic in a healthy way. It was a big challenge, you know, you could only have so many of those conversations online. You could only do so many of those things via Zoom. And you know, they were certainly not in great shape. It's hard for them to go from the college experience, back home to mom and dad, and all of a sudden like family dynamics row back in play, and the independence you once knew and loved does not bear anymore, not only because of the pandemic, because your parents are your parents and all those sorts of things. There's just a lot of care that needed to happen that was just very hard to find.
- 12:54 [JW] And regarding communication in the early pandemic, you spoke to this a little bit already, but is there anything else you'd like to say about that? Like, how did the early pandemic and the lockdown affect your communication with your work, with family members, with friends?
- 13:13 [BC] You know, there are a couple of different things. There's like a scale of my families from New York City. I don't get back very often, so my communication with them had been primarily via you know, phone calling,

text message, for 14 years now. So that did not look all that different, you know, and my parents who have recently retired, but really just their life during the pandemic really did not look much different from their life prior to the pandemic, because their just enjoying life as kind of retired homebodies. And that was the repose, and I'm grateful to them, grateful that they had already been in that mode and so that didn't look all that different. Seminarians. with colleagues, that was a very different reality. Luckily, Zoom had been an existing thing. I think part of being in the academic world was that we had already used technologies like Skype, and Zoom, and video conferencing, so it was a less dramatic switch to using those technologies in a more substantive way. So lots of e-mail, lots of phone calls, or a lot Zoom meetings. I'm just trying to figure out what those technologies could do, and then what those technologies couldn't do, in terms of like the pastoral care of someone. Just being in someone's presence and being a listening ear, like that looks very different on the screen and than it does in person. Trying to make those adjustments on the fly, it was a little bit challenging but we got there in the end.

14:56 [JW] And in 2020, what were your responses to some of South Bend's policies and practices on quarantining, and masking, and then eventually the vaccine rollout?

15:08 [BC] Sure. You know, it's funny. We were sort of in an isolated reality here on campus, and a lot of ways the campus reality was even stricter than some of the South Bend reality at times, you know. And aside from a couple of daring trips to the supermarket, we yeah, we kind of kept the campus pretty tightly. So the benefit of living on campus was that— I should say, the downside of living on campus would be my encounter with a broader South Bend community was not as kind of intense, or as strong. So now certainly friends or colleagues who lived in South Bend, I heard about a lot of those things from them. But my ability to sort of witness those was a little bit mitigated. That being said, I think South Bend seemed to do relatively well in the end as a whole, seemed to do you know, there was at least somewhat consistent messaging regarding masks, vaccination, and quarantine. There were certainly gripes and grumbling because they're not fun, or convenient. For the outright hostility that was witnessed some places was relatively, at least in my experience, relatively muted. Everyone was, especially in those early months, was sort of in the more "let's just stick together to get through this" kind of mindset mentality, you know. That certainly changed in the walls as time went on. I think people just got tired of some of those things, and those inconveniences became to take a significantly heavier toll, as they kind of prolonged themselves. But especially those first few months, yeah it was relatively kind of a positive experience on this is what we have to do, so we're just gonna do it.

- 17:06 [JW] Would you like to speak to the vaccine rollout at all? Future researchers may not know about Notre Dame's policies about that.
- 17:15 [BC] So the vaccine rollout was a source of great hope, and a source of like an logistical feat. So obviously the university as a large, kind of collective living space. So at some point our students have returned to campus, we had quarantine and safety measures in place, but we were able to bring everyone back. We were somewhat high on the vaccine priority list, because you know so many students living in relatively tight quarters. But the same time, we were far from the top of that list, I think rightly so. The state and the federal government were primarily concerned with getting the most vulnerable parts of the population vaccinated at first. So the vaccine rollout here on campus came probably four or five months after the vaccines were initially introduced. I think it was met with excitement, we were one of the first universities that announced that vaccination will be a requirement to be enrolled at the university. By that point, some of those things became a little bit more divisive and certainly there was some pushback from family members, from students and their families, and faculty and staff. That push back was existed, and why I wouldn't say it was significant. I wouldn't say it was like an overwhelming wave, but it certainly was there. But at the same time, once we kind of came to the end of that primary round of vaccinations, we were at the work of the local government to have a vaccination site here on campus, and we sort of ran the vaccine clinic for four days to get all of our students vaccinated. By the time that was all said and done, overwhelming amount of students faculty and staff were indeed vaccinated, and kind of happy to get vaccinated, and even the number of requests for exemptions were were relatively low.
- 19:24 [JW] And were there clinics on campus?
- 19:27 [BC] There was. So, a part of our opening up reality was the development of a COVID response unit. So, a team of university officials, staff, physicians, whose primary responsibility was managing our COVID reality, and that began with testing, and quarantine, and isolation procedures and rules, which things that they kind of are able to then pivot a little bit and really leave this remarkable vaccination effort. I think we got close to 8,000 students vaccinated the first round in four days, and then came right back and whoever I think a month to do the second round of shots. And that was a pretty significant logistical effort, but at the same time I think went off relatively well.
- 20:21 [JD] Could you say a little more about how those things interacted with your work at the Basilica? As maybe experiences at the Basilica changed, you know, as a result of those policies, or that rollout?

20:34 [BC] Sure, absolutely. I think everyone was grateful when we were allowed to have people back at the Basilica in-person. At that time, those conditions where everyone was masked, everyone was socially distanced, the liturgical reality looks a little bit different. You know, I think the canter was like behind the plexiglass wall, in some self-contained unit and whatnot. There's people are certainly grateful to be able to worship in-person. What was difficult was that that worship experience really was kind of muted because everyone had to be 6 feet apart, and everyone had to be in the mask. And even our capacity was significantly reduced, so we would have, you know, for 10:00 o'clock mass, we would have people start lining up at 9:00 AM. And unfortunately, at some point, the church was just at capacity and we had to turn people away. And that was kind of a regular experience week in and week out for a year and a half. That's never fun, that always leads to some increased tensions to say "Sorry, we can't fit ya", but "All I wanna do is go to church," and that's great, but this is kind of where we are right now. So those conversations and interactions were certainly difficult, but I think we were able to pivot as best we can in. Our attitude on the Basilica staff was certainly one of "let's make do with what the cards you've been dealt, and let's just try to strive to do as as best as we can within the parameters we have to operate," and that attitude, I think, was helpful to have. It took people spirits up, forced us to be a little bit creative when it came to seating and kind of roping off, 'cause with all those sorts of things. But I think it led to our relatively healthy experience of worship and church for those who are able to come. The biggest kind of marked difference was the Triduum one of 2021, we moved from the Basilica to the Joyce Center. Just those are popular days, and we are still in the height of the pandemic. And not everyone was gonna fit in the Basilica. So the university who was gracious enough to allow us to use the Joyce Center for those masses with everyone seated 6 feet apart and whatnot. That was a big lift for our staff, those liturgies are complicated to begin within the church, even more complicated when you're trying to do them in a basketball arena. But again, those kind, the collective spirit of "this what we have to do, we're going to do it" kind of took over, and and they really were quite lovely liturgies.

23:24 [JD] Is the Triduum the days around Easter?

23:27 [BC] Correct. So Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Vigil on Easter Sunday.

23:32 [JD] Thanks, I thought that was it but wanted to make sure, thanks.

23:39 [JW] Father Brian, have you, or anyone you know, gotten sick during the pandemic, or throughout the pandemic?

- 23:46 [BC] So remarkably I have fared fairly well throughout the pandemic. I mean, I've never had COVID, I just never been symptomatic enough to have that experience it, and praise be to God. But certainly, a number of Holy Cross religious have been sick, and sick with COVID. And certainly a number of our students have been sick with COVID. Even in our little college, our situation was pretty small. There's eight of us when we return to campus and three of them got COVID, so the whole house went into isolation for 14 days. And that was that was certainly an experience, you know. Obviously, any number of some small number of our older Holy Cross religious unfortunately contracted COVID and died from COVID, or its complications. Those are kind of marked moments that help bring the reality home a little bit. I think it was a little bit easier for us here on campus to not see that impact as much. Everyone is relatively young and healthy. Most of our students who contracted COVID kind of bounced right back in a couple of weeks. And I think of all the students who contracted COVID, and there were a number of them, only two or three even made it to the hospitalization phase. So I think our experience on campus was a little bit skewed, just given the kind of youth and vitality of our populous. And so to have some of the older Holy Cross priests have experiences, and unfortunately fatalities, like that helped kind of bring the experience closer to home just a little bit.
- 25:33 [JW] Can you speak to the 14 days of isolation a bit more?
- 25:35 [BC] Sure. Old College is literally the oldest building on campus. It was built by Father Sorin in 1843. That houses our undergraduate seminary program. At that time, there were a ton of us total living in the house and we treated the house like one household, like any family would sort of. But that meant when one person got COVID, the house was going down into quarantine. What was nice was that there are other people in the house, you weren't completely alone. You'd catch people, and we asked people to kind of stick to the rooms as best as you could. But at the same time, you could knock on the wall of the guy next door, and you pass them all away things like that. So again, the togetherness did help manage that. No one was like completely isolated, which is all different for us, you know. Our students were sent like kind of apartments off campus, and they really were like locked, I shouldn't say locked away, but sort of asked to very much stay in their rooms and apart from everyone for awhile.
- 26:39 [JW] In what ways do you think the pandemic has been affecting both people's mental and also physical health?
- 26:46 [BC] Great question. Sometimes I think it had a big toll on people's mental health. I think people are just a little bit more skittish and anxious nowadays. I'm not necessarily sure it's a direct causal relationship to the

pandemic, but I think people's ability to assess risk and assess what's worthwhile and not worthwhile to do, has certainly been changed by the pandemic. And that certainly sort of grown and evolved as well. I think where people are now is very different from where people were eight months ago in terms of that. I think I've seen in the students, their ability to cope and manage a number of things has been diminished significantly. Their "A" students, are Notre Dame students, everyone was captain of the track team, and the baseball team and did mock trial and had a stunning GPA. That's how they got here. And two years of not having any of those extracurriculars, and online learning, really has impacted their ability to handle a full class load, maybe having a couple of majors, maybe being in a couple of extra activities, you know. Those require a significant ability to balance time and prioritize tasks, and those skills are underdeveloped and has a couple of years of students. And we'll get back to, I suspect we'll get back to a level of comfortably with multitasking that level, but it certainly has been a great challenge over the past couple of years. And that has led to just greater sense of being exhausted and kind of overwhelmed, and well, the burnout kind of mental health breakdowns and all those sorts of things.

28:45 [JW] And Father Brian, news coverage during the pandemic has focused on inequities in a variety of ways such as unequal risk of contracting COVID-19, also inequitable vaccine distribution, so how have you encountered these narratives, and what are your thoughts about them?

29:03 [BC] Sure. Again, my ability to encounter some of those narratives— it's been a little bit isolated in that I think we've worked pretty hard on campus to make sure that everyone had access to vaccines. Everyone was going to be able to get the vaccine. I think the local government here in South Bend did a pretty darn good job of making sure that also everyone had access to the vaccine. But I was certainly mindful of who was in kind of the essential worker category, and what sort of types of jobs those were, and needing to show up, and not being able to do your work remotely. They were a lot of folks from lower social socioeconomic statuses here in town. I was talking to a priest, we have a parish on the West side town that's predominantly Hispanic on St Alberts, and you know, their ability to work from home was not nearly as widely available as it was for certainly folks here on this campus. So that certainly leaves some much more increased risk. And not that there was a lack of availability of vaccine, but there's certainly some vaccine hesitancy in those communities as well which sort of added to a layer of inequity there. So again, like right in the face of it, I was sort of insulated a little bit, but certainly there are plenty of experiences and stories from other parts of the South Bend community that kind of affirm some of those realities.

30:50 [JW] You know, Father Brian, we've been asking everyone how did being in South Bend shape your experience. I might amend that a little bit, like how do you think being at—you spoke to this a little bit—but how did being at Notre Dame shape yours?

31:03 [BC] Yeah, that's a good question. I think it's shaped it in a number of ways. For one thing, there's far greater sort of oversight in terms of responsibility and authority at the university. So policies were probably a little bit more clear and less vague than in other communities, and though that may have caused a little bit of consternation, overall, it was probably more helpful. Like everyone knew exactly what they were supposed to be doing, everyone knew what they weren't supposed to be doing. How to, sort of, manage those realities was always a little bit delicate, but at least there's clarity in terms of what was prohibited, was not prohibited or permitted, you know. And I think that was, in general, more helpful to the experience. It was helpful just to be in the community where our students, again are young and vibrant, and kind of willing to roll with the punches a little bit. So certainly people were upset that it was far from the ideal. And certainly there was a lot of genuine reasons to be underwhelmed by the experience. Their ability to just sort of be around and have some conversations, I think made the, you know, the 2020-2021 phase of the pandemic, not nearly as intolerable as it could have been. And again, we took a lot of heat for it. Many universities stayed remote from the 2020-2021 academic year, and we decided not to. And they tell you any number of people were happy to criticize us for that decision. I mean overall, for our students and for our university community, there's a commitment to say that this was important. That the ability to interact with their classmates was important, but the ability to form and develop some sense of community was important, and we're happy to kind of make all those other things work to allow that to happen. That was a lot of work. I mean, hundreds of kids in quarantine a regular basis, but I think the willingness to put in that effort demonstrated a willingness to understand that the pandemic was important. The pandemic, and health, and safety was a top priority, but like everything couldn't come at the expense of pandemic safety. So yes, there's a little bit of risk in bringing our students back to campus. There's a little bit of risk, a lot of risk in having in-person classes adjusted and amended as they were. And you know, just sitting 6 feet apart and having a class of 20 in like a 200 person classroom. But again, the acknowledgement that even that was far better than sort of everyone staying at their home learning remotely, I think there was a lot of wisdom there. And that for our students, made the university's encounter with the pandemic very different from the life of their peers.

- 34:24 [JW] If you left Notre Dame during or throughout the pandemic or traveled at all, how did those experiences compare?
- 34:33 [BC] It was, so did I. You know, after a while, I eventually made it home to New York to visit my folks, and some other places. The part of the cultural shift was studying. Like going, you know, I made it off campus back home to New York in the summer of 2021. And by that point, there was a relative sense of normalcy here, not only in South Bend, but in certainly on campus at Notre Dame. Again, I don't think people were flipping about it, but like the pace of life had started creeping back up. And then going home to New York, and it's like moving back in time six months, you know. And everyone was out still kind of masking, taking a walk to the park, and people are very, very cautious and very insistent. So there's some of those cultural shifts in terms of visiting other parts of the country and seeing how they impacted the pandemic more significantly.
- 35:40 [JW] How have your relationships with your family, friends, and community changed at this stage of the pandemic?
- 35:47 [BC] Great question. I'm not sure they changed all that much. I mean, for interaction with my family has looked relatively normal. My interaction with friends, again, so many of whom aren't immediately there, so my primary way of interacting is via phone anyway. You know, those are have looked relatively normal. And the grace here in South Bend is we've made the friendships here work. Maybe that meant kinda sitting on someone's back porch, and yeah, having the conversation 18 feet apart or whatnot. But you know, relationally, I think I'm blessed, and a lot of us were blessed, to have friends who took the pandemic seriously, but at the same time, were thoughtful about reaching out to one another, and talking to one another, and supporting one another. In creative and strange ways at times, but you know that effort really showed people's love, and care, and attention, and support.
- 38:59 [JW] How, or did the pandemic change the way you see yourself and others?
- 37:05 [BC] Yeah, I think the pandemic certainly brought out a diversity of opinion, and furthered people's diversity of opinion, and that really can't be ignored. And I don't think, it certainly doesn't change the way I see myself or others significantly, but it makes us, makes me, at least just a little more attentive. Attentive to people's particular sensitivities, attentive to people's particular concerns. In a way, you know, that polarization has everyone friends set, and family set, in some way. I think it's impossible for us to surround ourselves entirely with like-minded people, so we're always gonna have counter-post. We share some differences of opinion, and just having to be more attentive to those the past couple of years has

just made me a little bit more— not cautious —but thoughtful about the way you interact with others, kind of gaging their level of comfortability, being attentive to what was gonna make them feel comfortable with interaction, you know. And that may be different for different people, you know, and once other friends we'd be more than happy to grab a drink, whereas with another to private not so much, you know. But it just kind of having to be attentive to those concerns and worries, a little more thoughtful with those things.

38:27 [JW] How do you beat, oh I'm sorry go ahead, Julia.

38:29 [JD] Oh, I was gonna ask again if that has appeared in different ways in your different roles on campus and in what ways?

38:39 [BC] Yeah, absolutely I mean if there was a lot of— part of my job is kind of taking the heat because someone is always unhappy about something. And even prior to the pandemic, that was the case. And you know, part of my responsibility is to steer course that is rational and reasonable, but the same time we're never gone meet everyone's requests. So that was true even outside of the pandemic. The pandemic certainly highlighted that, I mean, there was a segment of population that wished we had no distancing and no masks and whatever, and then there was a segment of the population that was outraged that people were in the church at all. And you know, letters from both sides saying like you're like the most horrible person in the world because you're allowing this to happen or you're not allowing this to happen. So, you kind of just take those in stride. Those come with the job, even without the pandemic, those come with the job. And trying not to let those strong opinions impact us too much, and kind of take them for what they are. They are valid opinions. But to say alright, this is the data that we have, this is what our public health officials are telling us, and this is the kind of course we're going to plod. I think that was our general mindset. That shifted a little bit after the vaccines were more readily available as well, you know. I think at that point it became clear that if you wanted to be vaccinated and you could be vaccinated. Our sense of like burden, in terms of having to keep people safe in that sort of way was lifted a little bit, because people could opt in. Like you could be vaccinated, and you could show up and you can be relatively relatively safe and secure. And so, like, our needs sort of collectively protect everyone by enforcing some of these realities shifted a little bit. But certainly, I think we always joke, should start a book with a number of emails and letters we got 'cause I mean they were from all over the spectrum, you know, because we did not even have in-person experiences because the masses were live-streamed. We were getting mail from, you know, 400 hundred miles away about something that happened at mass here. Like you weren't even geared to like worry about this, like what the? You know, your Father touched his face too many

times, or the why are you still giving out communion on the tongue, or why aren't you giving out communion other tongue. This really got people worked up in that sense. But those could be distressing, they certainly were. They caused a little bit more of concern and thought. At the same time, I think anyone in the job that kind of has that reality knows to just sort of, you take it for what it is and just keep on going. And it's certainly true for the university as well. Father Jenkins' inbox was significant. Again, any number opinions from parents, alumni, faculty, and staff. Again, they're all valid and we have to take them as seriously as we can. At the same time, it's impossible to meet everyone's demands, and we have to find a course that was reasonable, rational. It's kind of what our hope was.

42:15 [JW] And how do you view the pandemic now and even going into the next school year?

42:21 [BC] Sure I mean I think the pandemic is in the phase now where something to be attentive to and concerned about but luckily it just has a less tight grip on their day-to-day life and experience. In terms of, you know, like I think life here on campus and in northern Indiana seems relatively normal. I think we are at a stage where hospitalizations and fatalities continue to decline. Even though there might be a spike in caseload, I think that is helping to help us look at the evolution of the future of the pandemic, to something that is a reality from one that's gonna be manageable. So, like any other illness, something to be tentative to, certainly something to be attentive to if it becomes more serious and more fatal. Certainly, we want to keep up some of those practices of good hygiene, like washing our hands or whatnot. But at the same time, I think that the grip it has on people's day-to-day life has kind of loosening. And I think people seem relatively grateful for that. We're planning on a normal, in-person commencement in just a couple of weeks. That's gonna mean 14 thousand people in the basketball arena, and everyone seems to be relatively OK with that, you know. And again, all those events are live streamed if you're uncomfortable, you're more than welcome to participate virtually. But the response to the in-person event, has been higher than normal. It seems to be clear that people are eager to come back to some of those realities, and their risk assessment is shifting as well. In terms of, you know, the way they assess risk is certainly shifting.

44:16 [JW] Well, so that's the end of our prepared questions but when you agreed to be interviewed were there other statements or things that you'd like to say?

44:25 [BC] Uh not really, I mean, I think certainly this has been a generational, or defining moment for all of us. It had its ups and downs. I think what's

important for us to remember now, when we look back on it in 10-15 or 20 years, is how much we didn't know, and we really were good at making things up by the seats of our pants, you know. We knew that people were getting sick, we knew that especially in those early months, knew that people were dying. And we didn't really know how virus really was spreading, or what were the means of transmission and whatnot. And so a lot of things might seem kinda little silly in 50 years, or some of our responses might seem a little bit strange, but it's because we're working on the best data we had. We have come to know a lot about this virus in the past two years, and that certainly has changed the way we interact with it. But even, I mean, I remember the flight back from London. We were in the middle of this kind of this emergency evacuation, but no one was wearing a mask, and the plane was full. And you know, the Centers for Disease Control like did 5-minute kind of check before left the plane, but that was about it. Even for us, we had sort of unmasked realities for the first couple of months, even though we were isolated and separated as our kind of understanding some of the evolution was just coming to the science a little bit better, and coming to know how science and the other kind of issues at play, in terms of mental health and whatnot and social development, were unfolding. You know, we're willing to do a lot for a short period of time, but after year goes on like people patience for that and waiting times, people weigh in and a lot can change.

46:30 [JW] Well thank you so, so very much. I'm going to go ahead and stop the recorder here.

[Audio ends]